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ABSTRACT

In discussing school discipline, the place to begin is by considering whether detention, suspension, and expulsion help students and resolve discipline problems. Detention seems to be most effective when the student is detained on the same day and as close as possible to the time the offense occurs, but too often detention is used merely as a "dumping tour." The rationale for suspension is that it serves as a mechanism for getting parents into the school; however, a survey by the Children's Defense Fund raises serious doubts about its effectiveness in that regard. There seems to be a growing trend among educators in favor of inschool discipline programs in place of suspension or expulsion. In working to resolve school discipline problems, the principal should utilize group processes that allow each member of the school organization to share in the necessary leadership. The principal sets the tone of discipline in the school. Every effort should be made to gain staff awareness and cooperation on discipline. The principal should act mainly as a catalyst for improving discipline. Once the proper disciplinary climate has been established, it becomes the principal's function to maintain that climate. (Author/JG)

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THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND THE USE OF DETENTION, SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION AS DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

Paper for

AERA Annual Convention

San Francisco

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Introduction

It is generally conceded that a crisis situation, the dimensions of which are staggering, exists in America's cities. "Disillusioned youth slip slowly toward open rebellion against the established institutions of society - police, city government, the armed forces, and, yes, perhaps even especially, schools and universities."[1] Sadly, in many American cities, the problem of school discipline is threatening the stability and even existence of public schools. Though no one person or group can be held responsible for resolving the conflict single-handedly, administrative leadership is needed to resolve the external and internal problems generated by the lack of discipline. There is an obvious demand for an educational leader, through whom concerned men of good will can focus their attention and talent on problems at hand.

Such focus is imperative since citizens, parents, students, and educators alike are concerned about discipline in the schools. In the past this concern was confined primarily to urban areas, where vandalism and other acts of violence frequently occurred. However, in recent years, discipline has become a national concern. One has only to peruse the Gallup Polls on education for the past four years to see that the citizenry consider discipline as a major issue confronting the management and operation of schools. The National Education Association supports this view of discipline in the February, 1976 issue of the N.E.A. Reporter.[2] More recently, a nationwide study conducted by Research for Better Schools revealed that the lack of discipline permeates public schools and has reached crisis proportions, threatening the care, safety, and instruction of those students desirous of learning.

It is understandable that this preoccupation with discipline - or lack of it - in the schools has caused the educational community and the public at large to start blaming one another. Educators accuse parents of not providing support to school authorities when their children need disciplinary action and of being too permissive and lenient. It is further understandable that administrators are hard pressed to identify and encourage the development of techniques and strategies to assist them in handling the discipline problems confronting the schools.

The purpose of this presentation is not to provide a panacea for discipline problems in the public schools, but to examine the judicious use of detention, suspension and expulsion as disciplinary measures. In addition, a discussion of the significance of the role of the principal in resolving disciplinary problems will follow.

Before discussing these measures it is important to state the writer's view concerning the difference between discipline and punishment.

Discipline and Academic Capital Punishment

For some reason, the American public, fond of finding easy answers for complex problems, has chosen to focus attention on the symptoms rather than to engage in any thoughtful action based on a well-defined plan founded on an empirical base. Thus, society believes punishment by death or psychological means is the way to influence errant human behavior. It is interesting to note that many educators also hold the opinion that retribution is the answer; consequently, many of them still attempt to develop responsibility by employing disciplinary measures and techniques based on punishment.

Punishment does not work. Forget those who press that it is a humiliating experience; forget those who espouse punishment as a character builder. A careful analysis of the success educators have had employing such techniques reveals that they are not the answer. If they were so effective, they would not have to be used again and again on the same children.[3]

The writer is well aware of the pressure the general public would bring if school officials revealed that in order to develop responsible students, the schools would stop punishing students. The writer is also aware of the results of giving in to public demand. Hostility confronts school administrators because of the current problems in the school, many of which are perhaps the result of educators' and parents' failure to provide good role models. That is, adult behavior fails to be consistent with the expectations held for students. Resorting to woodshed punishment has not curbed delinquency in the home or in the school, but educators can begin reeducating society to the fact that responsibility is developed by disciplining students through experiences which enable them to see and understand the logical consequences of their behavior.

The development of responsibility comes from continuous example and experience. Therefore, educators must be good models and must not expect students to become responsible overnight. This does not mean that students are not held accountable for their actions, or that educators should not demand and expect the best from students, but that gaining maturity is an evolutionary process that requires time, direction, and a great amount of patience.

> Relative to the effective use of discipline . . . within the school, the principal holds the key. It is the task of the school principal to structure an atmosphere within the school wherein methods and procedures of discipline are particularized.[4]

The place to begin is by considering whether or not detention, suspension, and expulsion help students and resolve discipline problems. This is an especially valid inquiry since these disciplinary measures are made onerous by administrators and teachers who administer them without carefully scrutinizing the situation. There may be negative results because the welfare or "rehabilitation" of the student is not the prime consideration and because each student's problem is not treated as unique, requiring a special approach to behavior modification.

Opinions among educators vary regarding the use of detention as a disciplinary measure. The literature reviewed reveals that detention as a disciplinary measure, when it is reasonable and for a good and definite purpose, can be useful if it is structured so that the student being detained has an opportunity to reflect. A perusal of student handbooks suggests that there are two kinds of detention: teacher and school. Generally, teacher detention, used for student misconduct, make-up schoolwork, or additional instruction, takes precedent over school detention. School detention is generally assigned for the following violations:

1. Lateness to class and school
2. Presence in corridors or lavatories without permission
3. Class cutting
4. Defacement of school property (minor)

The regulations in the handbooks frequently stipulate additional rules for students repeatedly assigned to school detention. For example,

upon receiving ten detentions, the student will be placed in restricted detention, and a letter will be sent to his home, making the parents aware of the situation. After the student is assigned a specified number of detentions, suspension is generally recommended. In essence, detention is generally held after school and is used to discipline a student for a variety of offenses.[5] Its value and results are questionable. It runs counter to the adage "misery loves company." Frequently, it turns into a status symbol for the offender.

Perhaps, if strictly enforced, detention could be productive, but often it is used as a "dumping hour." It can further be argued that detention lengthens the schoolwork as discipline, decreasing interest and application by the student. Nevertheless, it is still widely employed.[6]

The most effective use of detention for discouraging the violation of reasonable rules and regulations seems to be when the student is detained on the same day the offense occurs and as close as possible to the time period. In discussing what the principal can do the writer will briefly speak to the "time out" model which can respond to those students generally placed in detention or suspended from school.

Suspension itself is presently the topic of controversy which arises out of legal and moral concerns. The Supreme Court decision in Goss v. Lopez[7] provided a ray of hope for those concerned about the apparent flagrant use of suspension and expulsion as disciplinary measures. It is difficult to determine the effect this decision will have on the number of students suspended each year. Prior to the Goss decision, millions of students were suspended each year. Although much has been said about the inadequacies of the educational system, students suspended frequently "end

in situations far more serious than if they had been allowed to remain in school and work out their problems."

Although there is a dearth of information concerning the reasons for most suspensions, a recent study by the Children's Legal Defense Fund[8] reveals that students generally are suspended for tardiness, unexcused absences, or fighting, usually with other students. Contrary to the views of many educators, major acts of violence, destruction of school property, assaults on teachers, drugs and alcohol account for a small percentage of suspensions.

Another of the Children's Defense Funds more interesting findings is the number of suspensions which took place in the 1972-73 school year "in school districts with a little over half of the student population in this country."[9] During this time period, there were approximately 1 million suspensions. School days missed amount to about 22,000 school years. Chicago, New York City, Philadelphia, Duval County and Cleveland, Ohio, were the top five areas for student suspension. In addition, the number of Black students suspended was disproportionate. To some, this reflects the disproportionate misbehavior of Black students, but the researchers found that this is not the case - the Black students were treated differently. A double standard was operating as far as student suspensions were concerned.[10]

The rationale for suspending students is that suspension serves as a mechanism for getting parents into the school. However, the survey conducted by the Children's Defense Fund found that only 33 per cent of the students suspended returned to school without their parents being involved in the reentry process.[11] Couple this with the failure of suspension to rehabilitate students and one is forced to ask the question - is suspension

the answer? This is not to say that suspensions cannot help some students; it says that educators should not view any one technique as the answer for all students. It is my contention that the principal must always be present and involved to insure the maintenance of a viable learning environment in public schools. However, there seems to be a growing trend among educators to have in-school discipline programs, rather than suspension or expulsion. These viable programs range from behavior modification counselor sessions, peer counseling, alternative schools, the contract system, and planned-learning experiences to experiences which "remediate dysfunctions and [do] not create new problems for society."[12] For example, at Roosevelt High School in Dayton, Ohio, an in-house suspension system referred to as the "shop" is credited for sharply reducing the number of students expelled and suspended from school. Students assigned to the "shop" had to complete their regular class assignments, and be involved in counseling sessions with their parents and the person who referred the student to the "shop." In addition, periodic meetings take place between students who have had similar problems and staff members for the purpose of clarifying their values and understanding how their behavior affects them. In each successful program the principal was instrumental in structuring, planning and influencing students' learning experiences to mitigate discipline problems.

The Principal as Tone-Setter

In carrying out his administrative responsibilities to resolve discipline problems, the principal needs to utilize group processes that allow each member of the school organization to share in the necessary leadership.

A staff grows as its members have opportunities to think, plan, and work together. If a positive and cooperative working atmosphere is to be established, teachers must have time, as a group and as individuals, to identify the school's problems and to plan ways of meeting them.[13]

The principal sets the tone of discipline in the school. There are many ways to go about this, but before one considers these methods, the most important aspect of discipline is to have a clear, concise, and reasonable set of rules, defendable to teachers, students and the community. If these rules are not defendable, they should be changed. A rule without reason leads to attack by one or all groups concerned.

The rules for discipline are ultimately the responsibility of the administrator. It would be very helpful for the administrator to listen to and enlist the help of all groups concerned in setting up these rules, as long as each group understands that the administrator will make the final decision. All disciplinary rules should be subject to review and revision whenever necessary. An administrator has to take into consideration all aspects of discipline: moral, legal and educational.

An administrator has to set standards of conduct in the school to allow for individual teacher differences. What is a behavioral problem to one teacher may not be a problem to another.[14] Some classroom activities demand different classroom atmospheres. A math class may at one time need total silence to work and concentrate on the task at hand, while in other classes, when groups are working, noise might be the order of the day. The principal must realize these differences and be able to recognize when noise or silence is constructive. The rule "silence is golden" may be a sign of a classroom dictator who works through total fear.

A principal cannot control each classroom himself. The only way he can effectively work is through his staff. If all members of his staff understand his rules of conduct and the goals he intends for them, they might be willing to work in that direction. Every effort should be made to have staff awareness and staff cooperation on discipline. Healthy school discipline cannot be reached any other way.

Staff and student body must share in leadership if they are "to become committed to expectations determined by the total . . . staff and/or by lay influences in the community." Their responsibilities, however, must be within the bounds of expectations that reasonably can be placed upon them.[15] If the principal expects to develop a harmonious and productive climate in the school, it is important that his behavior be consistent with what is expected of staff members. Such a climate helps to encourage open discussion of issues on a professional, rather than a personal, basis. Thus, the principal shows he recognizes that an unhealthy school atmosphere can adversely effect the emotional and social adjustment of students. By taking advantage of his opportunities to guide and support members of the school organization, the principal can help create a healthy situation in which children can have sound emotional experiences, find their school life gratifying, improve their social skills, and work at a high academic level.[16] In other words, the principal, with the assistance of his staff, must seek to develop a spirit of congenial "togetherness" among the members of the school organization.

However, some of the principal's time will be spent responding to questions from superiors, teachers, students, and parents concerning staff, equipment, materials, and other resources so that teaching can be

accomplished with a minimum of confusion. Teachers may view this as being of primary importance, but the principal's role in improving the instructional program, rather than providing maintenance, is much more difficult and significant, underscoring the need for the principal to become a facilitator of change, rather than a mere caretaker.

The message here for the principal is not simply to press his own perceptions of what each teacher and student should be, but to encourage them to believe in themselves. The administrator must remember that one of the most effective ways to develop responsibility is to involve students in the life of the school.

The improvement of discipline program in schools is an integral part of the principal's supervisory responsibilities. This implies change, for improving the program means modifying it; thus, controlled educational evolution must be considered one of the underlying purposes of administration. This does not mean that the principal is an agent of change in its pure sense, but is rather a catalyst for it. For example, Eye and Netzer[17] see administration influencing situations, persons, and relationships for the purpose of stimulating change that may be evaluated as improvement. In their opinion, which is supported by Ohles, administration should have a more direct influence on the educative process than scheduling, discipline, school security or even community involvement.[18] Of course, the principal is not the only person responsible for change, but he should provide leadership in the evolutionary process.

The principal must remember that some staff members will resist any proposed change and that their resistance is as often a manifestation of doubt in their own abilities to adopt or change as it is a sign of opposition

to the proposal.[19] One approach to this particular problem is a conceptual framework for the processes of change. In constructing the frame, the principal should strive to develop flexibility in himself, his staff, and the school organization to aid all concerned in dealing effectively with what Alvin Toffler calls "future shock." Only individuals who are able to resist the paralytic effects of change can effectively operate in a change-oriented society. Neither the principal nor his staff should have personalities that change with the wind, but he and his staff must be open to new ideas and responsive to the thinking of others. This openness should help the principal assist staff members in bridging the gap between theory and practice. He can also profitably avoid the pitfalls connected with relying solely on his own assumptions and intuitions about change, subjective reactions which frequently say more about the administrator than about the school in which he is working.

Research, however, has made available some useful conceptual ideas which should enable the principal to see each situation more clearly and objectively. The works of Guba and Clark, and Lewin and Havelock generate concepts, ideas and propositions which suggest certain actions which may be more appropriate at one point in the contemplated change than at another.

Acquaintance with this sequence of responses is to the principal's advantage for he must treat change as an evolutionary process. Change seldom occurs instantaneously; rather, it is a hierarchical process which requires that certain conditions be met before movement to a higher phase is possible. Omission of one or more steps may make it exceptionally difficult for the change to continue on an effective basis. Often the principal's frustration in the face of resistance to change will cause him to attempt to

speed the process unnaturally, but this very understandable reaction must be avoided.

Finally, the administrator must remember that change is a basic fact of his own life. If the principal is to manage change and not be managed by it, he himself must adopt a flexible style.

Course of Action and Implementation

Once a climate has been established, it becomes the principal's function to maintain that climate. If the staff has been included in working on the rules, part of the work is done. At the very least, they are acquainted with the rules. Inservice programs on discipline would work at this time. At these programs, the administrator should be ready and willing to answer all questions raised by teachers. The administrator should be in control and, if he has planned well and acts reasonably, he may be able to sell his package. A printed list of the disciplinary rules should be made available to all teachers in clear and concise language. The principal must be sure the student body understands the basis for the rules and regulations and the logical consequence of not respecting them. A copy of all rules and regulations should be given to all students. These rules should be written so as to leave very little room for misinterpretation by students. Small group discussion could be instituted for interested teachers and students.

A principal who does not get into each classroom is only kidding himself that he is an effective administrator. Only through personal observation can he see if a problem is real or imaginary. Where discipline is involved, a class might conceivably behave better because of the presence of the principal. To get a true picture of the situation takes some other

forms of observation. Videotape would help the teacher see himself and his problem. By going over this tape together, the principal and the teacher will probably both benefit. It would be good to listen to students talk about their teachers, though too much weight should not be placed on their complaints and compliments because both can be misleading. A walk in the halls can provide a general overview of the situation. None of these factors alone will be sufficient for making a decision, but by putting them together, one could zero in on a problem area.

Once the problem has been identified, the principal will have to consider a one-to-one working relationship to help the teacher. The principal has a legal obligation to protect the students from physical harm. He also has an obligation to see that the student gets an education, although it is hard to prove that this is being done. The principal will have to work with the teacher on these goals.

The contemporary principal must extend himself beyond his current practice and develop new ways of working with members of the school organization to make them realize that he is receptive to their ideas and concerned about their welfare. It is crucial that the principal realize that the objectives of the school and the needs of the staff members are interdependent. Therefore, every effort should be made to develop a camaraderie based on professionalism, not authoritarianism. In the writer's opinion, the principal must have an inexorable desire to help teacher and students grow.

Conclusion

Discipline is a critical issue in all schools today. Some people are demanding such measures as bringing back the paddle and the dress code, and teaching truth, justice and patriotism.[20] That such drastic measures are necessary could be argued, but it is hard to argue that a school can be run without discipline.

A principal's duty demands that he be in control of the school. The only way he can hope for this control is through help from his staff and from the students. The administrator who thinks he can do this by himself is either a fool or Superman. This is not the day of the little old guy who lives in an office and runs the school like a dictator. The principal must be the leader and he must be the person who makes well thought-out plans of action. He is now in a special age in which he is expected to be open to all new ideas and ways of learning that come along. It is impossible for the principal to rule with an iron hand.

It would be an aberration to discipline without thinking of the student's welfare or rehabilitation. The principal must be instrumental in coordinating the guidance services so that referrals and behavior modification techniques are used. The principal must coordinate the activities of the administration, faculty, parents, and involved students so that punishment for infractions of disciplinary rules can be an in-school learning situation, instead of out-of-school suspension or expulsion.

It is my experience that most students are not bad. They are "hip" - cognizant of their world - and have various reasons for rebelling. Every person is more good than bad and sometimes it takes patience on the part of

administrators, counselors and teachers to help problem students to modify their behavior so that it is within the "accepted norm." Whatever the reason for the problem, the principal must handle each case in a unique manner and try, if at all possible, to work out a reasonable punishment in school rather than suspending or expelling the student. The following are some thoughts on dealing with the student in a positive manner:

- Use behavior modification techniques, such as behavior contracts.
- Allow the student to "speak his piece" and air his gripes.
- Replace punishment with "understanding."
- Work out with the student, not for him, a "reasonable discipline."
- Allow students more participation in school affairs.
- Seek "professional" help for the student.
- Help teachers to establish rapport with students.
- Be consistent in administering disciplinary action.
- Discipline rather than punishment.
- Involve parents in disciplinary procedures.
- Conduct parent conferences at school or have teachers visit student's home.

The most effective use of detention for discouraging misbehavior seems to be making it obligatory for the offender to pay his debt on the same day the offense occurs. As this may mean missing the bus home, being late for a club meeting or athletic practice, and having to have a parent come in to take the student home should he live far away, it becomes a more meaningful form of discipline.

If strictly enforced, detention can be a productive hour. But often it is used as a "dumping ground" for offenders by teachers who can thus

spend less time with their student problems. It can also be argued that this form of punishment tends to lengthen the school day and use schoolwork as punishment, decreasing interest and application by the student, if it is still widely employed.

It is the writer's opinion that discipline in the schools is dependent, to a high degree, upon the attitude and philosophy of the principal. A principal must be committed to helping people grow; this includes fellow administrators, teachers, students and parents. Also, he must have a deep conviction and belief in what he is doing. The principal's attitude and philosophy will persuade and influence the spirit and deportment of the entire staff and student body and will indirectly affect and influence the town. The principal, indeed, is an important factor to discipline in the schools.

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